

Reading and Character

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The Niobites

We Practise What You Preach

The Catholic Mind

SEMI-MONTHLY

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Reading and Character

By JAMES J. DALY, S.J.

*A Paper Read at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the
Catholic Educational Association, St. Paul,
Minn., July, 1915.*

I TAKE it for granted that the phrase, "a taste for reading," is a liking and preference, not so much natural as acquired, for the best literature. I also take it for granted that the formation of this taste, in its relation to character, is to be considered from a Catholic and supernatural point of view, with some special reference to Catholic schools.

In the beginning it is just as well to make certain statements of fact which will keep us from overestimating the value of a literary taste as a personal possession. A man, first of all, can save his soul without literature. He can be a great saint without it. Genius or great natural gifts make it possible for a man, without any knowledge or love of literature, to attain high distinction as a military leader, a statesman, a physician, a lawyer, a theologian, a secular or ecclesiastical administrator, a captain of industry. Nay, further, the ordinary person can be honest, honorable, prudent, conscientious, noble, truth-loving, amiable, useful and kindly in all the relations of ordinary life, and still never have caught a glimpse of the magical light in great books. It is comforting to know that so many people can get along smoothly, contentedly, and happily without any desire for the classics.

It may be doubted whether the world contains many more pleasing sights than that of humble, peaceful souls who pass their lives in the cheerful and faithful acceptance of a small round of duties, masters of themselves, sane in their outlook and modest in their desires. Their secret of happiness is a philosophy hidden from the wise. If we meet with such in the class-room, we need not be concerned about their constitutional indifference to literary excellence and their lack of intellectual curiosity. They have more than literature can give them, and the teacher of literature can afford to resign himself without a struggle to this form of incapacity.

But, alas, most men do not react to the stimulus of life with the serenity that comes from grace or a happily endowed nature. Ambition, when it is successful, continues to tempt men to arrogant and offensive self-sufficiency; and, when it is thwarted, to sourness, envy, malice and selfish preoccupation with their grievances. At all times men, as a rule, are prone to seek distraction wherever they can most easily find it; and to meet this instinct the world is full of cheap amusements, cheap companionship, cheap magazines and papers, social frivolity, idle gossip, and dangerous lounging places, not to mention grosser forms of sin and dissipation. I dare say a large portion of civilized mankind, in these days of material splendor, feel the gnawing of vague discontents and experience a restlessness and devouring curiosity that verge on disease. All kinds of views are propounded and urged in the daily intercourse of men; and, unless a man has something to fall back upon, as a corrective and a guide, his state is sure to become one of mental bewilderment and moral instability.

It is in circumstances like these that a taste for reading

is, as Father Faber states, almost a grace. But the assertion needs to be carefully guarded from misinterpretation. It is hardly necessary to declare that I do not in the slightest degree share modern illusions about the perfectibility of man through education, art, the sciences, literature or any conceivable natural process. An educated man, or a refined gentleman may be, and often is, more benighted morally, that is, in his highest function as a rational creature, than many of his unlettered fellow-men. Literature, taken by itself, only augments the ills of the soul and of society. Literature, at its best, can never bring, of itself, to the human heart the peace that passeth understanding. The world cannot give that peace; neither can the voice of the world, which is its literature. Literature, indeed, strives to destroy the grossness of vice, but not by destroying the vice. It tends, in its full compass and content, towards that climax of all immorality, namely, to conceal the natural grossness and putrescence of sin under the attractive refinements of art. I do not say it aims to do this consciously, or in malice, or at all times; but in its repudiation of Christian ideals it cannot help drifting in the direction of moral perversity and spiritual darkness.

Yet, when all this has been said, it remains true that, given the gift of faith and an humble fear of losing it and a reasonable care to safeguard it by preserving the moral and intellectual conditions for the receptivity of religious truth, there can be no doubt that for most of us a taste for reading is an immense natural help in the temporal and spiritual difficulties of life. Besides preserving us from ignoble and trivial recreations and amusements, it cooperates with grace in aiding us to overcome serious temptations; it lifts us out of narrow

and selfish absorptions; it tends to destroy an exaggerated and silly confidence in our own opinions, and to sow a salutary distaste for violence and extremes in thought and feeling, speech and action; and it supplies to the mind rich and abundant material for reflection and spiritual nourishment.

Moreover, a discriminating taste for books creates and develops fine enthusiasms and a lofty idealism, which, left to themselves, may end, indeed, in ashes and dry bones, but, transplanted by our Catholic Faith, become transfigured with imperishable beauty in the glorious airs of the supernatural life. A taste for reading, to mention one of countless instances, was the natural instrument employed by Heaven in removing St. Ignatius of Loyola from the narrow interests of a military career and the spiritual mediocrity of a rather worldly man to the apostolic arena of Christian conflict and the heights of personal sanctity. The history of the Church in education leaves no doubt as to her estimate of literary training as an ordinary means for disposing the soul for high purpose and achievement. Wherever circumstances have left her free she has always favored that form of education which is called liberal, in which the study of literature and the cultivation of a literary taste play the leading parts.

The habit of reading is worth acquiring for the things it brings us as well as for the things it saves us from. The genius and the saint can cultivate depth and sanctity in thought and character without it; but for the ordinary person it is the natural means of deepening character, acquiring and maintaining intellectual poise, and disposing the will to effort without making it harsh and ruthless. Even professional literary men may not neglect the

habit of reading. "I dislike to meet a man," says Dr. Johnson, "who writes more than he reads." The reason is that our mental horizon continually tends to close in upon us and to become commensurate with the trifling externals of a sphere of experience, more or less narrow and limited. Thus we find men, learned as well as illiterate, who are bumptious and self-important because they have forgotten that there were brave men before Agamemnon; or who fight tooth and nail for opinions and theories that were declared untenable in the days of Plato; men, who cultivate a comfortable and specious consciousness of power and ability by guarding themselves carefully from contact with superior minds; who can plume themselves on mediocre and small achievement by contriving to forget historic triumphs of the human will and intellect; who feel valorous and virtuous simply because they have forgotten about saints and heroes; whose manners, untouched by the grace and magic of high memories, take on the native dullness of the average temperament and the dead hues of a prosaic environment.

But valuable as the reading habit is in the expansion and deepening of our character, as far as it concerns ourselves, its value is vastly increased when we regard it as an agency in that enlargement of character which transcends merely personal ends and aspires to do good to others. A saint has said that illiteracy may have its spiritual uses for the individual, but it has no uses whatever in conferring benefits upon others. We are often tempted to sneer at culture because it is so often associated with weak and superficial character and is employed so industriously in favor of wild-cat theories of morality and religion. But Cardinal Newman has

warned us not to blame culture for the common crimes of its followers. He has reminded us that culture is the outward expression of the ideal of charity described by the Apostle, that the world's mistake consists in beginning at the wrong end, in cultivating the artificial externals of culture without respect of the inner soul of Divine charity of which, in its more perfect state, the noble and attractive traits of culture are the natural expression; that, if the Church seems to lay less stress upon culture, it is because she is kept too busily engrossed with the primary stages of her task, with the interior spirit and essence of true culture, which consists in acknowledging and reverencing the claims of God above all other claims upon our attention, our consideration and our obedience. This is a fundamental truth that we cannot afford to forget. Mere ignorance can give no glory to God. To hold culture in contempt is to belittle the gentle and sweet perfection of the Saints. To carry the burden of our own rudeness boastfully, as if it were an ornament, will not win approval in heaven or on earth. We thus defeat the only possible uses of shortcomings which are to afford us occasions either of meeting them, if they are insurmountable, with a contented and humble spirit, or of overcoming them manfully if duty and opportunity invite or command us. And a shortcoming it is, beyond doubt, of a rather serious intellectual kind, which consists in being unacquainted with the best thought of the world in its various orders and epochs. And its seriousness is increased if our position or our advantages place us where we are expected to exert a strong religious influence upon the lives of our fellow-men. Who will seriously maintain that a disregard or a contempt for books, among the rank and file

of our Catholic population, helps them individually in their morals or their faith? Who will deny that it is an obstacle which prevents the Church from engaging the respectful attention of thousands who need most just what the Church has to give? A shallow obliviousness of great literature, among Catholics at large, will affect for the worse our schools, our newspapers, our representatives of Church and State. The "free-masonry of literature" is only dangerous when it is dissociated from religious belief and practice: it is not itself under any ecclesiastical ban; and in these days of educational idol-worship it can win a hearing for any cause: even the cause of Christ and His Church.

To restate the whole matter briefly: Literature, then, standing alone, has little or no virtue in the essential formation of character, which is to school the will to act, in secret and in the open, under the eyes of God. The motives, which help a man to cleave to his duty in the face of "clenched antagonism," can be drawn from religion alone. But religion can find a powerful natural ally, in the building up of character, in the habit of reading. This natural auxiliary operates negatively by substituting innocent for dangerous amusements, and by removing to a distance, and weakening, whole classes of grosser temptations. While, on its positive side, it helps us to view the world from afar in the safe shelter of a quiet Catholic atmosphere with all the resources of our religion at hand wherewith to equip ourselves against the hour when the needs of life urge us to take our part in the rough chances of that world. A taste for reading, furthermore, makes us acquainted with the noblest thoughts and actions of mankind, and thus stirs in us a noble rivalry, and a fear lest we, who are the recipients

of supernatural bounties, should in any wise appear less noble or courageous than children of the world. And finally familiarity with good books tends to widen the field of our duty in importance and scope by increasing our natural capacity, while it cooperates with grace in softening the angularities of an unswerving will and producing externally the flowers of Divine charity that make religion and holiness beautiful and attractive even to a hostile world.

As for the cultivation of the reading habit, it is best of course to begin early, and, as the child depends upon others for guidance and opportunity, parents and early teachers have much to do with the formation of the habit. In coming to this part of my subject I can only give personal impressions and the results of observations taken from a distance. My opinions, therefore, may have only the interesting quality of an outsider's point of view without that practical and detailed wisdom which comes from first-hand experience.

As far as experience goes, I can testify that high-school graduates, as a class, have not acquired, when they enter college, a taste for reading. It is not a new phenomenon. Cardinal Newman in a letter which he wrote to James Hope-Scott in the early seventies, lamented that many boys in his school at Birmingham had never read any of Sir Walter Scott's novels. He made a suggestion in that letter which has since been carried out into practice more elaborately, I fancy, than he ever contemplated; namely, that the English masterpieces be made the subject of school examinations. Up to that time the vernacular, as a distinct branch of study, had not received much attention in the classical schools of England. During the forty years that have intervened since

Newman penned his complaint the story has been different. The list of required English readings in our schools and colleges, Catholic and non-Catholic, is enough to equip a professional literary critic for life. And yet the old complaint still survives.

An insuperable juvenile aversion to books is, let us admit at once, sometimes inherent in the young subject himself, sometimes in the unavoidable deficiencies of his circumstances. In neither case does blame fall on parent or teacher; but often, it seems to us, parents are responsible for the comparative illiteracy of their children. The parents of the last generation may not have had any higher taste in literature than those of the present: but they had, as a rule, more rigorous notions of their position and responsibilities in the education of their children. They may not have had an intimate acquaintance with books; but they respected such an acquaintance; and, what was important, they had mastered the elementary lesson that some books and papers were bad and should not be read by children. Some of us may still remember their Spartan application of that lesson. What a breathless and perilous adventure it was in the days of our youth to read an illustrated weekly, or a novel with a sensational title, or with a paper cover! It was a nefarious business that had to be pursued at the expense of comfort and peace of mind and was often more exciting than the romance for which we endured it all; and discovery was invariably attended with hideous penalties. One of the glorious memories of those days with many of us is, how by some happy accident we suddenly found out that the respectable volumes in the bookcase were not so dull as they looked. Henceforth our reading was carried on in the broad light of the family lamp, with

a new and comfortable sense of virtue, and a peaceful consciousness of parental approval.

Those Draconian days are no more. The old paperback contraband of our youth has put on stiff board covers, has risen in value from ten cents to a dollar and a half, and by these insidious disguises has won entrance into the penetralia of the home. Not that it matters very much with those indulgent parents who are only too happy if the sporting sheet, the popular magazine, or a "best seller" can keep the children indoors after night-fall and accomplish what their weak authority is helpless to enforce. This is a state of things which no school can cope with except in isolated and most extraordinary instances. I do not suppose the suggestion carries with it much practical wisdom: but it would be most desirable to have instruction-classes for young parents in which they could be taught, for instance, the beauty and utility of a family reading-hour in the evening, arranged and conducted by father or mother or family adviser for the special benefit of the children. The influence of such a custom on the unfolding character of the child could only be fruitful of happy results. But this practice presupposes serious and tactful parents.

To turn from the home to the school, it is possible that the discouragements of the home are sometimes reinforced by new discouragements in the class-room. Often that English course is considered to be the most successful which is the most disagreeable to the youth. If it bristles with rhetorical analysis and paragraph-studies and curious erudition and philological facts, with a running comment of beautifully-phrased formulas, very creditable to the industry of the teacher but unintelligible to the pupil, the English class is apt to be mentioned with

approving nods in official quarters. Masterpieces are chosen for high-school study, such as Milton's "Lycidas," which no ordinary youth and few ordinary teachers have the maturity or the cultivation to appreciate correctly. The most that can be said of such a text is that its editor's notes and critical apparatus have been conscientiously conned and committed to memory. The young student may have gleaned some interesting facts, and imbibed an awful and distant reverence for the masterpiece. It is surrounded in his eyes by a hedge of ritual and ceremony and rubrics, penetrable by a few chosen souls, but a peremptory barrier to normal intelligence.

This may be teaching English, as a science, which is well enough and even necessary, if it be kept down to the capacities of youth; but it is not teaching English, as a literature, or developing a taste for reading. Let me state that I am suspicious and on my guard whenever that modern pedagogical principle is laid down, that study should be made easy and pleasant for the child; and, again, that I share in the serious educator's detestation of "snap-courses." But I maintain, in spite of these convictions, that in the nature of things a large element of pleasure and attractiveness must enter into the teaching of literature. A lyric poem cannot be taught like a proposition in geometry. The teacher of literature addresses himself more to the inclinations and feelings of the student than the teacher of mathematics.

There is danger, of course, that a system of teaching, which directs itself to the inclinations of youths, will be wasted upon them, and nine times out of ten will be a farce unless their memories and understandings are kept engrossed in definite grooves of hard labor. This is very true. And, therefore, I hold that some measure

of stiffening in the form of analysis and memory work and written exercises should enter into the program of English classes. But my objection is to the overwhelming of the student with this kind of scientific ingredients. Just how much stiffening is needed is a question to be decided by circumstances. If the English course, for instance, were the only course, I should say a great deal. If it were one of three or four courses, somewhat less. If, as in many schools, it is one of six or seven or eight courses, some of them very severe and exacting, I think the dry discursive and analytic features of the English class could be considerably curtailed with profit to the pupils.

In drawing up elaborate programs of study for our English course I fear we are unduly influenced by the example of secular schools. We may not have ascertained whether the general conditions are the same with us as with them, or whether in practice those ambitious programs have been tried with success. Again, we may be under the necessity in some places of grading our courses with reference to the requirements of such secular schools. If the necessity really exists, no more is to be said on the subject. Discussion is useless when we are deprived of initiative. It may be well to remember, however, that in general the undue imposition of severe and rigid analytical and rhetorical processes upon the English course makes the teaching of literature mechanical and uninspiring, and is apt to be welcomed by incompetent teachers more than by those who, enjoying a genuine taste for reading themselves, earnestly desire to impart that taste to others. And it is a principle that should never be forgotten that we cannot do much more than contribute to a superficial conceit of the youth-

ful mind by placing greater emphasis on what is said *about* books than on what is said *in* them.

A large portion of the English hour, where the teacher is at liberty to do so and is guided by a sound taste, could be used profitably, it seems to me, in reading to the class. This reading could be subjected to brief running commentaries of the teacher, not bookish or learned comments, but natural observations suited to the circumstances and characters of the pupils. The boy should learn that high, clear thought, true, strong feeling, and noble deeds are the material of literature at its best; that the formation of a lofty character is the best preparation for literary appreciation and production; that the aberrations of genius are the aberrations of the weak human being, who has trusted too proudly in the sufficiency of his natural powers and too little in the need of God's help, and has fallen, as men do and will, to shameful depths; that literature is not pedantic learning, or formal rhetoric, or fanciful experiments in language, unrelated in any serious way to life and conduct, but is a vital, organic, breathing history of man's soul, in its weakness and strength, its foulness and its beauty, under the impact of the world's countless influences good and bad. With this view of literature as a serious and profoundly interesting actuality, and not an idle ornament of the drawing-room, it is not necessary to confine our reading to great poems and classic examples of style. The lives of the Saints, and the heroisms of Catholic history, especially such as occur in periods of persecution like that under Elizabeth, are just as effective in cultivating a sound taste for reading, especially in very early youth, as poems and classic fairy-tales. Familiarize the young mind with striking instances of

thought, feeling, words, and acts on the higher levels where our manhood is at its best, and you will have gone a great way in redeeming it from its besetting proneness to the vulgarities of cheap pathos, false sentiment, flip-pant smartness, and mean and selfish policies of conduct.

I have not been asked to speak of the dangers and abuses of the reading habit. They are too many to enumerate in a brief paper. A nerveless dilettanteism, a tendency to find in a dreamy, purely imaginary goodness self-extenuation and excuses for an actual life of sordid selfishness, a perverse curiosity that loves to dwell amid heresies and animal passions: these are a few of the dangers that lie lurking for teacher and pupil alike along the high-road of literature. For literature is the voice of the world, that world against which Christ bade us be on our guard. A boy cannot be taught too soon or too often that the safety of his spiritual and eternal interests depends upon his advancing in piety and Catholic knowledge in proportion as he advances in literature. His home must be with Christ and the Apostles: thence let his excursions be made to the Areopagus and the Forum; and thither must his steps return with eagerness and fear; and there must his spirit learn to find its repose and its refreshment. If he stays too long with the pagan philosophers and poets, amid their marble columns and fair gardens and gleaming statuary, listening to music that bemoans, while it renders attractive, the futility of the human mind and will to discover truth and attain happiness, the youthful Catholic, and the grown-up Catholic, too, may find the company of Christ and the Apostles, and the familiar atmosphere of his ancient home, wearing a strangeness that makes him feel ill at ease and out of place.

Perhaps, I cannot bring these observations to a more fitting close than by citing the admirable example of one whose character displays in its satisfying fulness the advantages of an ideal taste for reading. Father Bridgett, in his "Life of Blessed Thomas More," quotes the following testimony of Erasmus:

More avers that he is indebted to literature for better health; for the favor and affection he meets with from his excellent prince as well as from his own countrymen and foreigners; for an increase of wealth; for becoming more agreeable both to himself and his friends, more useful to his country and his relations, more fitted for life at court and intercourse with nobles as well as for all society and social life; and lastly for becoming more dear to Heaven. Formerly learning had a bad name since it seemed to deprive its votaries of common sense. Well, no journey, no business, however prolonged or arduous, makes More lay aside his books; yet you will find no one who is so companionable a man at all times and to every class, so ready to render service, so affable, so lively in conversation, or who knows so well how to unite solid prudence with sweetness of manner. Hence it has come to pass that, whereas a short time since, a love of literature was held to be useless either for practical or ornamental purposes, now there is scarce a nobleman who considers his children worthy of his ancestors unless they are educated in good letters. Even in kings a great part of their royal splendor is seen to be wanting where there is little acquaintance with literature.

This awakening of literary interest, it is to be noted, was one of the agencies which helped on the national apostasy of England. Thus we have the unusual picture of a beatified saint of the Church striving successfully to release, by virtue of his example, a tremendous force that was to destroy the Kingdom of God in millions of souls for many centuries. Literature helped

Blessed Thomas More to be a saint; it has made heretics and infidels out of countless of his countrymen. But, though the Church has good reason to be suspicious of literature, which has been so often used against her, she recognizes in it a powerful instrument for good on the side of the Angels. Else she would not have numbered Thomas More among the Beatified. Rather she urges him upon our attention as a model in the cultivation and use of a valuable accomplishment at a time when civil liberty, denied to Catholics in Reformation England, allows the Church its freedom of the press.

It is only a natural accomplishment, it is true, but like so many natural blessings and gifts it needs but to learn to bow the knee to God and to feel its own creaturehood in order to be transformed into a graceful and strengthening element in Catholic character. The difference between Augustine and Julian, More and Tyn-dall, Newman and Renan, is the difference between the spirit of man, recognizing its own inherent deficiencies and casting itself humbly upon Christ in habits of prayer and religious practices, and the spirit of man unwilling to confess its own weakness and a law unto itself in the gratification of its own desires. And the lesson to all Catholic teachers is that religious instruction and inspiration are absolutely necessary conditions in making a taste for reading subserve the development and perfection of character, and serviceable to the glory of God.

THE NIOBITES

By WALTER DWIGHT, S.J.

“**D**EAR me,” sighed the Prioress, “how hard I find it to be patient with sad-faced nuns! To my mind a melancholy religious is a contradiction in terms.”

“I heartily agree with you,” said the Chaplain. “Gloomy nuns should be sent to the Niobites.”

“The Niobites, Father? Who in the world are they?”

“What! have you never heard of the Niobites? Why, it’s the name of the new Congregation I am founding. I have already drawn up for the Order, an admirable Constitution which will be submitted in due time to the Holy See for approval, and I hope to have eventually a novice or two.”

“A new Order!” exclaimed the Prioress. “How interesting! You must tell me all about it, Father.”

“There is not a great deal to tell. As you know, I have had considerable experience in giving retreats to nuns, and in a few of the convents I have visited, I have observed a Sister or two, first-rate religious in other respects, who seem to think it well becomes their state to wear such doleful faces that a chance visitor would infer that they are very unhappy in the cloister, whereas these gloomy-looking Sisters are really quite cheerful and contented.”

“That’s true, Father; I know nuns just like those. But what about the new Order?”

“Well, it is meant for religious of this kind. They are to be called Niobites, after that pagan lady of anti-

quity, you remember, who wept profusely. The object of the Order is reparation. For these Sisters engage to atone by incessant weeping for the abundant joy and happiness to be found in all the convents in the world."

"But wouldn't it be hard, Father, to keep crying all the while; that is, unless artificial aids could be used?"

"Precisely," the Chaplain continued. "That's just what would have to be done. So onions would be the *pièce de résistance* of every meal, while horseradish would be a common side-dish. Heavy penances would be imposed for indulging in anything so alien to the spirit of the Order as jesting or laughing. Sheer inability to weep for protracted periods, or a studied neglect of the means the Institute provides for keeping up the flow of tears, would of course result in the aspirant's final dismissal.

"The houses of this new Order, it may be of interest to hear, will be called, not monasteries or convents, but lacrymaries. They will be erected, as a rule, in gloomy vales, by 'dank tarns,' or, better still, in the neighborhood of desolate meres. Skilled architects are to submit designs for these lacrymaries, and artists have promised me sketches for interior decorations. A row of weeping caryatids, for instance, will support the architrave, while around the frieze will run a row of alternate urns and onions in high relief. Within, all the walls will be hung with rustling tapestries depicting scenes like Niobe's punishment, Dido's death, or the Pleiades' sorrows. The lacrymary garden will likewise be wholly in keeping with the purpose of our Institute. No trees will be planted there but weeping willows, or somber fir-trees, and no flowers will be cultivated, save those that 'sad embroidery wear.' Nor would any sound he heard within

the lacrymary close, except the moaning of doves, the wailing of the whip-poor-will, the tolling of the convent bell, the sighing of the wind through the pines, or the soft splash of fountains. No jarring note must meet the ears of Niobites."

"Those nuns will be safeguarded from distractions and temptations," assented the Prioress, "if you give them a garden like that. But are they to have no occupation but weeping?"

"O yes. But nothing foreign to the spirit of the Congregation. All must be in keeping. She prayeth best who weepeth best. The more gifted nuns, of course, will be chiefly occupied in writing letters of desolation."

"Letters of desolation? What can they be?"

"You know what letters of consolation are, I hope? Well, letters of desolation are just the contrary. A prudent virgin will be deputed to scan the paper every morning and whatever joyful events she finds announced, she will report to the superior, who in her motherly care will command one of her subjects to write a letter that will plunge the recipient in gloom. A new-made bride, for instance, would get a note reminding her that though she is happy now, she is not likely to be so for long. If a christening has just taken place, a letter is at once despatched to the fond parents saying: 'Your lambkin is free from sin now, to be sure, but how long will he remain so?'"

"Such occupations are rather conducive to promoting melancholy," agreed the Prioress. "Are your Weepers to have an appropriate habit?"

"O yes," cried the Chaplain, with enthusiasm. "The habit is a masterpiece. Robes of sable black hanging in ample folds; a long train, a veil that sweeps the ground;

a wide scapular of bright yellow reaching to the feet; coif and gamp also of yellow: hanging at the girdle a large saffron-hued handkerchief edged with black; and finally a bag made of yellow silk, which is always to be worn at the girdle and kept constantly filled with tiny onions. Won't that be striking?"

"No question," said the Prioress. "Rather pretty and graceful besides, I fancy. Perhaps the novelty of the habit would secure you some vocations."

"No doubt. Why, any young lady who has once entered the Order would find all our customs and practices so unique that she would never have the heart to leave us for a more conventional Congregation. For example, our Sisters, resolutely discarding all such worldly and profane salutations as 'Good morning' and 'How do you do,' will say dolefully on meeting one another, 'Die we must' and and those thus greeted will answer as sorrowfully, 'And the hour we know not.'"

"Why you have foreseen the smallest details, Father!" exclaimed the Prioress, admiringly. "But do you really think you can get any postulants to come—and stay?"

"I must confess that I am sometimes troubled with misgivings about that," admitted the Chaplain, a little despondently. "However, all founders met with difficulty at first. And who am I," he added piously, "to hope to be exempt? I realize how hard it will be to get, and especially to keep, suitable subjects. But I mean to be very exacting, nevertheless, for it is better far," he continued, his cheek kindling with enthusiasm, "to have but two or three stanch and fervent Niobites, who will weep perpetually, than a whole lacrymary of faint-hearted, ungenerous souls who will shed tears only now

and then. We owe it, moreover, to those who come after us, that they may ever find in the earliest Weepers of the Order, such perfect models of fidelity to our rule and such stainless mirrors of our Institute, that even the most fervent Niobite of ages to come, when studying the history of the Order's infancy, will be forced to exclaim amid a gush of tears, 'Ah, there were giants indeed in those days! How far alas, have we fallen away from the spirit of our mothers!'

"Your weeping posterity will certainly need all the encouragement they can get," the Prioress observed. "Do you expect no trouble in securing the approbation of Rome for your new Order, Father?"

"Well, yes," admitted the Chaplain. "I am aware that the Holy See is more disposed nowadays to lessen than to increase the number of Orders and Congregations. But you see, Lady Prioress, there is nothing in the Church like the Niobites. The aim and object of this Institute is thoroughly original and new. Reflect, too," the Chaplain went on glowing again, "how lofty and noble is the life of a true Niobite. Keeping ever in mind how peaceful, joyous and smiling nuns with few exceptions always are, she undertakes to right the balance by incessantly weeping, and to atone for all the sunshine that innumerable glad-souled religious bring into the lives of others, she pledges herself to diffuse around her nothing but gloom."

"A sublime calling indeed!" assented the Prioress. "Nevertheless, I have misgivings about your success in developing such superhuman vocations. However, if your Reverence were to visit all the convents of the country, you might find half-a-dozen postulants to start with."

"Who knows!" said the Chaplain hopefully. "Any single young lady who is eligible, I would, of course, be glad to see entering the Order, though widows, I fear, will hardly do, as the motives for which Niobites weep must be wholly supernatural, and their tears free from all suspicion of being prompted by any sorrow that is at all of the earth, earthy. Then ere I say my *Nunc Dimittis*," went on the Chaplain, while his countenance was that of one rapt in a heavenly vision, "I may one day see beside a malarial mere in some desolate valley, the rising walls of a lacrymary. I look again and behold gathered within its somber chapel a hundred sacred virgins, garbed in the varied habits of their Congregations, solemnly approaching the altar to take from a sable-suited bishop, the striking vesture of the Niobites. Two years have passed and again I see these holy maidens, clad now in trailing robes of black and yellow, solemnly sweeping in long procession to the altar, there to pledge themselves to unceasing lamentation till the end of their days."

"That would be an impressive sight, no question," agreed the Prioress. "Well, Father, I mean to do all I can to help you secure subjects. I shall not fail to tell my Sisters all about your new Order this evening during recreation and I will then receive applications, provided you confer on me all the necessary canonical powers."

"Good!" exclaimed the Chaplain. "I appoint you forthwith *vicaria ad hoc*. Let me know the result. Well, Lady Prioress, I must be going, as I have some sick to visit. Good morn—that is, 'Die we must.'"

"'And the hour we know not!'" answered the Prioress, trying to look very melancholy.

A week later the Chaplain and the Prioress chanced to

meet gain. "Well, Mother," he inquired, "did you find any vocations for the Niobites among your Sisters?"

"Not a single one" answered the Prioress, with a laugh. "I thought I had one or two suitable candidates, but would you believe it," she continued more seriously, "since I told the Sisters about the new Order, my sad-eyed nuns have changed completely. If one of them appears in recreation wearing a long face, she is promptly greeted with 'Die we must' and before she has answered 'And the hour we know not,' she is laughing merrily. Really, Father, all the nonsense about the Niobites has done our community a world of good. I fear I can send you no novices now, but I am very grateful to you for telling me about your Holy Weepers."

"It's all very well to be grateful, Lady Prioress," rejoined the Chaplain gloomily, "but if this goes on, where shall I find postulants?"

WE PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH

By DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.

THE eminent professor of psychology sat meditatively gazing into his grate, warming his soul at the brisk fire. The attitude was conventional and the exterior person of the professor was conventional; but aside from that there was little conventionality in the man. On the table near at hand lay the manuscript of the lecture he was to deliver to his class on the morrow, and now he sat conjuring up the faces of the two hundred young men who would drink in his revolutionary doctrine with something akin to excitement. All the afternoon he had labored at that lecture; blow after blow of his trip-hammer logic he had aimed at the obsolete doctrine of free will, and now the lecture lay there a miniature bomb ready for the terrific explosion.

Beginning with the self-evident proposition that man is a mere physico-chemical machine without more soul than a billiard ball, he had traced the compelling power of heredity and environment upon the actions of that machine. "There is no such thing as sin," so ran his triumphant conclusion; "crime is but a psychical disease. Man is no more responsible for his crimes than he is for his weak tonsils, his falling hair or his tendency to insanity. With the delusion of free will, primitive man tickled his vanity. Science knows that it is as false as his belief in a happy hunting ground. Man is not free, but a slave."

The flame in the grate flickered, died down, then leaped into new life. There was an uproarious shout in

the street such as only college boys can or dare utter. A moment's pause and then was heard a sharp rap at his door.

"Come in!" said the professor, who prided himself on his personal interest in his students. The door was flung open upon a youth whose clothes were a taunt to dignified reserve. He stood for a moment abashed in the sacred shrine of learning, and then impulsively offered the professor his hand.

"I've just dropped in," he said, "to congratulate you on your afternoon lecture on free will. It was the most important event in my life."

For a moment the professor was puzzled. He glanced at his desk calendar. To be sure, he had delivered that revolutionary lecture this very afternoon. Why had he fancied it was to be tomorrow?

"Sit down, my boy," he said, and his glowing countenance cast the flickering fire into complete shadow. "Delighted! Glad you liked it. It's a satisfaction to know that the undergraduate appreciates the fruits of years of mature study. Here, sit in this comfortable chair."

"Thanks," said the youth, "but I can't. The fellows are waiting for me. We're off for a night of it—down there."

The youth pointed through the window out into the night. Instinctively the professor turned to follow the line of his finger to where a blaze of white light glowed against the dull sky of a winter evening. It was a mysterious light, compounded of arc lamps and incandescent bulbs, of flashing diamonds and shimmering shoulders, of candles burning at both ends and the scorched wings of moths.

"I've never been there before," said the youth; "I've

sort of clung to the creed of my youth which made me pray to be delivered from temptation. I felt a responsibility for my future, and I didn't want to take risks. But thanks to your lecture, I know that all this talk of responsibility is poppycock; and so I'm off with the crowd. The fellows say that down there it's glorious until midnight, and it's glorious to the fifth power. Why didn't you give that lecture months ago? I've been a fool in missing the fun."

"My boy," said the professor, wiping away the sudden dampness that chilled his brow, "sit down a moment. You see—er—that is, you mustn't take my words too literally. I——"

"Look here," said the youth almost fiercely, "you're not backing down on what you said this afternoon, are you?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried the professor, snatching wildly at the house that he saw falling suddenly about his ears. "Not that, but——"

"Well, that's all. Good night! I'd feel like the deuce hitting the the pace if I really were responsible for it. But you said yourself a chap can't fight down his wild, hereditary impulses; he can't resist the chemical and physical forces that draw him on in spite of himself. I'd fancied I had succeeding in breaking the devil in me; but I know now that I was no more free in doing good than I shall be in tripping the primrose path. And the second's a lot easier. Thank you and good night!"

"My boy," the professor's voice was pitched high, "won't you stay with me instead? I'll explain further just what I mean. You don't quite grasp——"

The young man hesitated just a moment. There was a warning shout from the street below. "No," he an-

swered, "thanks just the same. I've given the crowd my word I'd go. I've fought them off for a long time with my conscientious scruples. When they invited me for a night of it, I told them honestly I had to take care of my soul. But after the lecture I didn't dare say that; and when they joked me about flattering myself that I was free to care for what does not really exist, you had left me no answer. So I pledged my word.

"You're lucky. You're not free to be bad even if you want to be. Here with the fascination of your books and studies, hedged in by strong public opinion, with your chemical forces as quiet as a crystalline compound after evaporation, everything forces you to be respectable. But study doesn't attract me, and life and light and laughter and love, and the whole alliterative group, do. There is no public opinion for me except that all college men have a certain acreage to be sown plentifully with wild oats, while the chemical forces of my nature are boiling and effervescing like Dante's sulphuric baths.

"And now I can take the whole group of "L's" to my heart, scatter wild oats till the seed-sack is empty, and let the chemical forces of my nature bubble up and boil over; for I'm no more responsible than the Frankenstein was for the ruin in its wake. When I believed in free will I was a slave; with the knowledge of slave will, I am free."

As another shout from below reached the lad, he turned to go. "I'm off," he said, almost sadly, "I'd rather hate to have mother and the girls hear of this; but even if I smash their hearts I'm not responsible for that either; so I've got to take the risk. If I sleep in class tomorrow, Professor, I'll not be to blame for that either."

The door slammed and the professor rushed wildly to

the window. Below a crowd of boisterous youths were welcoming the recruit with enthusiasm. Into the throbbing cars they tumbled, and away they went into the darkness that lay between the college and that seductive strip of light, with horns shrieking and the gleam of their lamps piercing a rent in the shadow of the night.

Trembling, panic stricken, at the sense of his own responsibility, the professor stood with his eyes following that flying car. It was he who had stripped the youth of the one thing that had held him back from moral ruin. His hands had flung down the bars to these turbulent passions. The sins of the youth were on his doddering old head. What though his theories were right, that free will was a foolish dream, had it not been better a thousand times that he had never spoken? Oh, to be able to bind in once more the wild passions he had loosened, he would give——

The flame in the grate flickered and died down and then leaped into new life. The professor half sprang from his chair. On the table lay his lecture with the ink fresh upon it. The desk calendar registered the day previous to the day set for its delivery. With a quick movement he seized the manuscript and thrust it toward the flame. He paused; smoothed the crumpled page gently, his eyes turning slowly toward that light still glowing against the wintry sky. He read the opening sentence thoughtfully, and then carefully laid the paper back on the table.

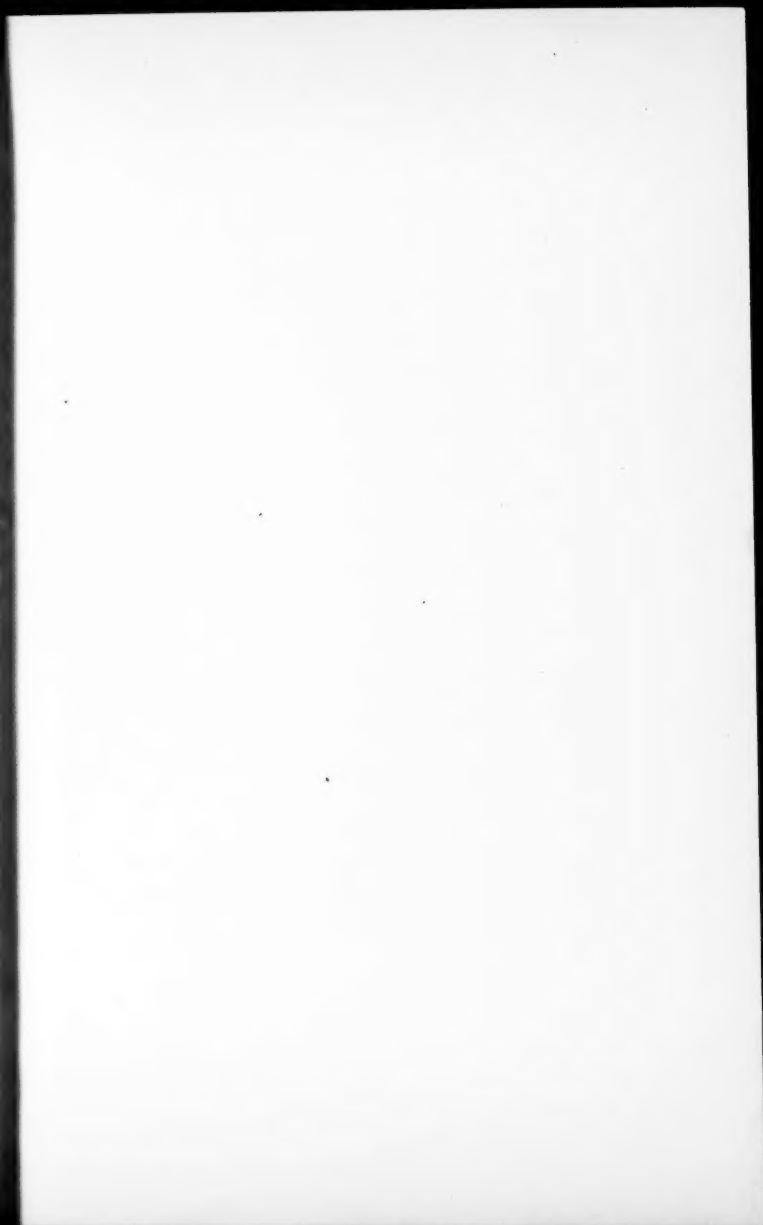
"Let science prevail," he murmured, "though the heavens fall."

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